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# CAUSES FOR MILITARY DESERTION; A STUDY IN CRIMINAL MOTIVES

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[We have the privilege of presenting here a remarkable study in criminal motives, one of the few of its kind ever made, and an example of that kind of study which must be the basis of a reconstructed criminal law.

Modern criminal science has thus far neglected completely this field of analysis. One reason probably is that the psychologists cultivating criminal science have been concerned chiefly with the pathological and abnormal side of its psychology. Another reason is that the psychologists are so little agreed on a scientific classification of motives that they hesitate to commit themselves to any one classification as the basis of a scientific study; they are made timid by their science; yet others can "rush in where angels fear to tread" without being rash.

But the most important reason for the lack of such studies is that the data in our civilian crime records are virtually non-existent, and such a study is feasible only by enormous expenditure of time and money. The disgraceful and shocking fact of civilian justice is that it *keeps no records of the facts of crime*. This pernicious and shameful neglect I have already pointed out, in its contrast with military justice, in my article on "Some Lessons to Be Learned From Military Justice" (JOURNAL, X, 2, 170 ff.). A general court-martial keeps a complete stenographic report of all proceedings, including testimony; a civilian court keeps only a note of the charge and the verdict. This deficiency is to blame for most of our slowness in getting at the facts of crime, including causes, motives and remedies. *We do not know why crimes are committed*; therefore we are incapable of adapting our remedies to the causes, either generically or individually.

In the military system these records can be studied and generalized. Towards the close of the war, Col. E. L. Munson, formerly of the Medical Corps, now chief of the Morals Branch, General Staff, determined to undertake a study of the causes of military offenses, with a view to preventive measures. The offense of desertion was selected for a beginning. The study was carried out by Major E. N. Wood-

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bury, of the Coast Artillery Corps, and is now available for private circulation in manuscript form. Doubtless it will some day be printed in entirety. But owing to its value as an example of sound method, permission was obtained by the Editors of the JOURNAL, from Major-General Haan, Director of the War Plans Division, General Staff, for publication of that portion dealing with Causes of Desertion.

The entire study is in 6 parts, copiously illustrated with graphs. Part 1 deals with the crime rate of desertion since 1830. Part 2 compares enlistments and desertions. Part 3 studies the relation between desertion and punishment and between causes of desertion and other offenses. Part 4 compares desertion with the labor turnover in civil industry. Part 5 studies conditions of discipline in relation to desertion, seeking to disclose the factors of locality, personnel and methods in their relative influence. Part 6 inquires into the Causes for Desertion. This Part 6, with a portion of Part 3, was selected for publication here as having greater general interest; but for its complete significance, of course, the remainder of the entire study would have to be taken into consideration.

JOHN H. WIGMORE.]

#### CAUSES OF DESERTION AS DETERMINED BY REVIEW OF RECORDS OF GENERAL COURTS-MARTIAL

1. It is believed that the best method of determination of the relative value of the causes of desertion may be found by review of the records of General Courts-Martial for cases involving desertion and absence without leave. Although no comprehensive compilation has been made of the causes of crime in the service, it is believed that valuable information may be obtained by study of a brief compilation made from 6,811 records of General Courts-Martial, of which the cause has been recorded in 3,363 cases.

2. Of the 3,363 cases mentioned above, there are 663 cases of desertion and 625 cases of absence without leave. The 3,363 cases have been divided into four general groupings as follows:

(a) Connected with the Character of the Offender, total 2,015, of which 252 cases are for desertion and 247 absence without leave.

(b) Connected with the Service, total 769, of which 141 are for desertion and 160 for absence without leave.

(c) Connected with Family Matters, total 369, of which 131 are for desertion and 186 for absence without leave.

(d) Connected with Matters Outside the Army, total 86, of which 39 are cases of desertion and 24 absence without leave.

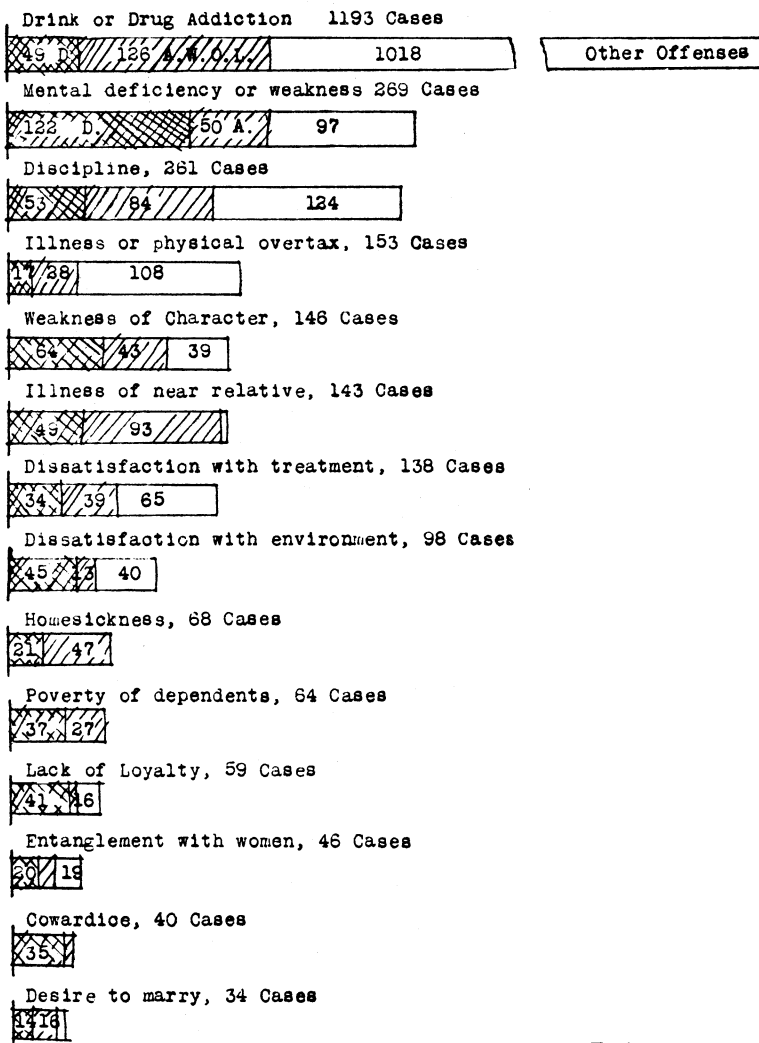
3. In order to classify these 3,363 cases more in detail, it is possible to divide 2,713 of these cases into 14 groupings shown on Chart No. 16 in the relative frequency of causes. The composition of each of the fourteen groups is as follows: (a) Drink and drug addiction; (b) Mental deficiency or weakness, including mental weakness, degeneracy, ignorance, the established criminal and criminal instinct; (c) Discipline, including failure to understand reasons for discipline, fear of punishment for other offenses, failure to appreciate seriousness of offense, and lack of discipline; (d) Illness or physical overtax, including illness, physical weakness, fatigue from unknown cause, and fatigue from excessive duty; (e) Weakness of character, including character weakness, instability, irresponsibility, youth and wanderlust; (f) Illness of near relative; (g) Dissatisfaction with treatment, including belief of unjust treatment, dissatisfaction with medical treatment, failure to obtain transfer or discharge, manner of order, military causes provoking, nature of order, failure to carry out enlistment promises, poor handling by officers, and refusal of furlough; (h) Dissatisfaction with environment, including dissatisfaction with organization, discontent with station, conditions out of control, friction with noncommissioned officers, general dislike of service, racial difficulty, and unpopularity with associates; (i) Homesickness; (j) Poverty of dependents; (k) Lack of loyalty; (l) Entanglement with women; (m) Cowardice; (n) Desire to marry.




4. On Chart No. 16, above mentioned, will be found under each group the proportion in cases of desertion and the proportion in cases of absence without leave and the remainder. It will be seen that but 5 per cent of the cases found due to drink or drugs resulted in desertion. Mental deficiency and mental weakness is shown as the largest cause of desertion, and drink or drugs the largest causes of absence without leave. Those crimes included in "other offenses" are Escape (122), Disrespect and disobedience (422), Solely military offenses (92), Offenses with violence involved (451), Dishonesty (417), Offenses by sentinels or guards (164), Offenses against decency (72), and Miscellaneous offenses (15).

5. In order to determine the relative frequency with which the most numerous causes may be expected to occur, Chart No. 17 has been made, to indicate that which may be expected to cause the majority of enlisted men to desert or go absent without leave. The chart is based on 1,000 men, and may be seen to show that, e. g., out of one thousand deserters there should be 184 who deserted due to mental weakness or deficiency and 32 who deserted because of homesickness.

## Chart No. 16.

2,713 most frequent causes of Crime as found by review of 3363  
Records of General Courts Martial in which causes were determined.



(NOTE: The divisions marked in  represent that proportion where the finding was Desertion;  for Absence without Leave;  for other findings.)

## Chart No. 17.

Relative frequency of the most numerous causes, where cause is determined, of desertion and absence without leave, which may be expected for 1,000 convictions of each offense.

## DRINK OR DRUG ADDICTION:

Desertion, 74 cases

Absence without Leave, 202 cases

## MENTAL DEFICIENCY OR WEAKNESS:

Desertion, 184 cases

A.W.O.L., 80 cases

## ILLNESS OF NEAR RELATIVE:

Desertion, 74 cases

A.W.O.L., 149 cases

## DISCIPLINE:

Desertion, 80 cases

A.W.O.L., 135 cases

## WEAKNESS OF CHARACTER:

Desertion, 96 cases

A.W.O.L., 69 o.

## DISSATISFACTION WITH TREATMENT:

Desertion, 51c.

A.W.O.L., 63 o.

## HOMESICKNESS:

Des. 32

A.W.O.L., 75 cases.

The six principal causes include approximately sixty per cent of desertions and eighty per cent of men who have gone seriously absent without leave.

6. In connection with Chart No. 17, it is of interest to note that drink causes the majority of absence without leave, whereas drink causes comparatively little desertion. It will be seen that weakness of mind and weakness of character cause a large proportion of desertion, but not absence without leave. The largest figure for desertion not included on this chart is dissatisfaction with environment, which, of one thousand men, causes 68 desertions and but 21 men to go absent without leave.

7. It is of interest to note that excessive drink has an influence on desertion and absence without leave, although the period covered by these records was that in which it was contrary to law to sell intoxicants to men in uniform, March, 1919, to March, 1920. It is believed that the difficulty in the procurement of intoxicants will reduce these figures on later compilations.

8. In the consideration of the above statistics the fact must be remembered that no definite proportion may be gained from the review of so few cases. It is the opinion of the writer that the best information possible may be obtained from the study of records of Courts-Martial in every command.

#### SUMMATION OF CAUSES OF DESERTION

1. In the previous chapters of this study an attempt has been made to show the influence of some of the most tangible causes of desertion. From the previous chapters it may be seen how complex are the influences affecting desertion. It should be kept in mind that this study has been made from conditions occurring *in the past*, and that there may be a number of entirely new conditions arising in the future with new results. It is therefore believed that the study of desertion is thus a continuous study; every organization commander will be confronted with new combinations and problems in the handling of desertions.

2. In general, the statement is correct that desertion occurs when the "pull outward" exceeds the "pull inward." There are some cases of desertion where the individual may be said to get a "push outward" due to his unpopularity, and again there are often cases of men who would desert but for the public attitude against slackers and deserters (as during the European War), or a family influence, which may be termed a "push inward."

3. Due to the fact that an organization commander seldom has the opportunity of questioning a deserter, it becomes necessary to determine the cause of desertion in another manner. This may be done by careful study of the causes of absence without leave and study of the causes of failure to re-enlist.

4. In order to cut down the rate of desertion in any organization it is necessary for the organization commander to study each individual in the organization, promptly to locate and remedy any adverse conditions at the station or within the command, and to search out and improve such conditions without the command which cause discontent to the individual or entire command.

5. It is necessary, in the study of the individuals of an organization, to pay especial attention to men found to be:

- Mentally deficient or ignorant ;
- Irresponsible, young, unstable or easily influenced ;
- Addicted to drugs or excessive use of intoxicants ;
- Physically weak, ill or physically deficient ;
- Degenerate or of weak character ;
- Of known bad or criminal civil record ;
- Discontented, disgruntled or homesick ;
- Gambling excessively, winning or losing by gambling ;
- In financial difficulty, due to fines, forfeiture of pay, allotments or insurance payments :
- Given to association with, or a victim of, immoral women ;
- Needed at home due to financial trouble or serious illness of family, or desirous of marrying ;
- Chronic wanderers.

It will be seen that the majority of these individual troubles are not remediable by the organization commander. Such defects should have been discovered by the Recruiting Service by complete mental, moral and physical examination. Nevertheless, it is believed that these defectives should be discovered and especially handled by the organization commander.

6. That desertion occurs chiefly from among the young and uneducated enlisted men may be seen from statistics compiled by Lieutenant R. P. Parsons, U. S. Navy, at the U. S. Detention Camp, Deer Island, Mass., where more than 2,500 deserters from the Navy were kept awaiting trial and sentence, or serving probationary periods, during the year ending April, 1919.

Lieutenant Parsons found that deserters from the Navy are chiefly from among the men of least education. It was found that 50 per cent



of the deserters were men who had not finished the seventh year of grammar school, whereas in the Navy at large but 23 per cent are men who have not finished the same year of school. It was further found that but 19 per cent of the deserters had attended high school, whereas in the Navy at large there are 43 per cent who have attended high school. Sixteen men of the one thousand deserters had attended college, and 42 men in each one thousand of the Navy at large had attended college.

It was found that up to and including the age of 19 years there was a great percentage in favor of deserters. In other words, young men desert more than men of a mature age. It is found further that 43 per cent of the deserters are nineteen years of age or less, whereas in the Navy at large there are but 21 per cent, or less than half the number of the same age.

7. In the study of conditions within the organization or conditions at the station which may be the cause of desertion, the following are suggested:

- Are recruits "eased" and not "broken" in?
- Are the promises of the Recruiting Officers being kept?
- Are the barracks made comfortable and kept clean?
- Are messes run efficiently with properly cooked food?
- Is the uniform properly fitted and are provisions made for cleaning and pressing the uniform?
- Is punishment administered with undue strictness or with too much leniency?
- Is the pass and furlough privilege as lenient as possible?
- Are men properly punished for absence without leave?
- Is every opportunity offered for visits to the nearby city or town without necessitating absence without leave?
- Is hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation encouraged?
- Is too much time being given to study?
- Is military drill and discipline being sacrificed for educational training?
- Is the proper amount of entertainment being furnished?
- Is the consequence of desertion carefully explained to those who are ignorant and slow in understanding?
- Are all possible quarters provided for the families of enlisted men?
- Is the social status of the enlisted man kept up both at the station and in the nearby civil community?

Is the amount of guard and fatigue excessive for the size of the command?

Are drills, encampments and maneuvers held with proper regard to the climate?

Are enlisted men required to work with civilian laborers, doing the same class of work at less pay?

Are intoxicants or drugs easily obtainable?

Are any other conditions allowed to continue which cause dissatisfaction with the command or station, which could be corrected locally or by higher authority?

It will be seen that this list includes factors which are within the power of organization commander to correct. The proper attention to these factors results in the "efficient administration" of a command.

8. Some of the external conditions which may be expected to influence the amount of desertion are enumerated as follows:

National prosperity, ease of obtaining employment;

High rate of civil pay as compared with army pay;

General unrest throughout the country;

Labor unrest, anti-recruiting propaganda;

Proximity of war;

Civil attitude toward deserters from the army;

The attitude of the civilian toward the uniform;

Political policy negative concerning the army;

Prohibition.

Although these factors are generally without the power of an organization commander to correct, it is believed that when one or more of these conditions exist it becomes the duty of the organization commander to increase the attractiveness of service in his organization. By such measures the "pull inward" may be increased to offset the increasing "pull outward."

9. In many cases it is believed that fancied wrongs or over-estimated troubles have caused desertion or, in some cases, have caused absence without leave which resulted in desertion, which could have been remedied by financial assistance from the Red Cross or proper handling by advice or information of the organization commander. Such conditions should be sought out by the organization commander and corrected. Under this heading comes:

Poverty of the family or dependents;

Serious illness of the parents or wife;

Wife expecting birth of child;

Failure of allotment or war risk insurance payments;

Mishandling of men by officers or non-commissioned officers;  
Dissatisfaction with medical treatment;  
Failure to obtain transfer, discharge or furlough;  
Unpopularity with associates;  
Belief in unfairness.

10. It is believed that the importance of the early detection of causes of discontent cannot be overestimated. While it may seem almost impossible to locate all the causes of discontent, nevertheless it is for this purpose that the Morale Organization of a command exists. The use of the Morale Organization, to the determination of all causes of loss in morale, should result in the tabulation of the causes of discontent of each individual as well as of the whole command.

11. In many organizations there will be found men who are not satisfied with conditions and who intend to desert when the opportunity arises. Very often the associates of these "potential deserters" will know of this desire to desert. It is considered of great importance to locate these "potential deserters" and to remove, if possible, the definite cause of dissatisfaction. It will be found that often the remedy will be found in a change of station or organization or the change in the nature of duty to that of more responsibility. It should be borne in mind that the saving of a potential deserter to the service is worth more than the recruiting of a new man to fill his place after desertion. The loss to the service of a deserter includes the time and expense of training, the reward for apprehension, the time and expense of Court-Martial, the time and expense of the post guard, the maintenance cost of the military prison, and the time and expense of recruiting a man to replace the deserter.

12. Reports of Morale Officers indicate that in many cases it will be found that there is a marked difference in the amount of desertion from different organizations of the same command at the same station. Often these organizations will be regiments of the same troops. Under such conditions, it is believed that prompt steps should be taken to determine the particular cause of discontent in the organization showing the high rate of desertion, and, failing to determine the cause, it is believed that transfers of officers and non-commissioned officers from one organization to the other should be made.

13. The better education of the general public in respect to the appreciation of desertion as reprehensible and an offense is important.